

The site of Le Sueur's Fort L'Huillier /

THE SITE OF LE SUEUR'S FORT L'HUILLIER.*

* Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, November 14, 1904.

BY THOMAS HUGHES.

No event in the annals of old Louisiana appeals more to our interest than the founding in 1700 of Fort L'Huillier. The daring enterprise of Le Sueur in pushing so far into the very heart of the wilderness, the romantic records we possess of the adventures he and his followers met, and the mysterious copper mine which they claimed to have discovered, all contribute to our zest in the story, and especially so since the scene is laid in our midst.

In spite, however, of the attention paid to this historical event, no special attempt has heretofore been made to locate upon the ground the exact site of the old fort.

To aid in determining the location, we possess three nearly contemporary authorities: first, an extract from the daily journal of Le Sueur, the leader of the expedition, which La Harpe copied into his history of Louisiana; second, the Relation of Penicaut, a ship carpenter, who was a member of Le Sueur's party, and whose account of the founding of the fort and life therein, as given by him in Paris some years later, was written down by a friend, and preserved; third, early French maps of this locality, on which the fort is designated.

From these original sources we learn that the fort was situated on the Blue Earth river, about a league from its mouth, on the east bank, close by and just below where its eastern tributary (designated on one map the "St. Remi," on another the "St. Henry," and on later maps as the "Le Sueur") empties into the Blue Earth, on a point of land about a quarter of a league distant from the timber. Three quarters of a league above it, on the Blue Earth river, were the copper mines of green earth.

It is also stated that the fort was situated at 44 degrees and 13 minutes north latitude; but, by reason of the evident inaccuracy of any such calculation which Le Sueur could then make, it has little value as an exact statement.

As the fort consisted of three or four log cabins inclosed by a log palisade, the timber used in its construction must have been conveniently obtained, since Le Sueur's party had no means to transport it except by hand. It is also evident that in selecting a site for a fort it would be natural to fix upon the strongest and most commanding position in the vicinity where good water and building material were handy.

Right at the confluence of the Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers stands a large natural mound, about sixty to seventy-five feet high, with a few acres of fairly level land on its top. It is on the right or eastern bank of the Blue Earth river, and just below the mouth of the Le Sueur river. Its side toward the Le Sueur is so precipitous that no timber can grow thereon, and its side toward the Blue Earth river, is extremely abrupt, but wooded; while in its rear lies a small fertile valley, extending from one river to the other, and varying in width from a quarter to half a mile or more. This valley, now called the "Red Jacket valley," in its original state was a strip of meadow land, which cut the mound off from the timber and bluffs beyond. The sides of the mound toward this valley are also quite steep, but were always, as now, grass-covered, with here and there a few scattering bur oaks.

The top of the mound is now a cultivated field; but originally it had a grove of two or three acres of heavy timber upon it. The highest point is immediately opposite the junction of the two rivers, where this grove once stood. It is a most commanding spot and affords a magnificent view of the Blue Earth and Le Sueur valleys.

Some of the early settlers remember noticing, before the land was grubbed and cultivated, indications of an old excavation just at this point. The place by actual measurement is distant from the mouth of the Blue Earth river about a French league, or somewhat less

Library of Congress

than three miles; and the bed of blue or green clay, which the Indians used for pigment, and which Le Sueur supposed to contain copper, is found three-quarters of a league farther up the Blue Earth, in its southeastern bluff, and nowhere else.

285

On the very top of the mound, and within a few feet of where the fort must have stood, a fine large spring of running water gushes forth, which in pioneer days never failed in summer or winter.

In fact, the top of this mound tallies exactly with all the data we possess regarding the fort's location, while no other spot tallies with any of them.

A careful study of the foregoing facts, with a thorough personal inspection of the country, made many times during the summer of this year 1904, has convinced the writer beyond a doubt that this natural mound at the mouth of the Le Sueur river, on the farm now owned by Mr. J. H. Ray, is the site of the old Fort L'Huillier; and this conclusion is fully and unanimously concurred in by Gen. James H. Baker, Judge Lorin Cray, and Prof. U. O. Cox, who in September of this year personally investigated the sites of both the copper mine and the fort.